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ABSTRACT

Issues pertaining to the retention of black students, particularly those attending predominantly white colleges and universities, are reviewed, based on a survey of the literature. Three categories of concerns were found in the literature: ways of conceiving black student retention; factors affecting retention; and strategies and remedies to increase retention. During the early to mid-1960s, there was an emphasis on integrating black students into white university systems, while after the civil rights movement, many called for an educational process that addressed the intellectual and cultural needs of black students. Level of academic preparation has been found to be a central determinant of student persistence, and alienation and group identification have also been identified as key influences on attrition. Remedial strategies identified by the literature include: expanded efforts in outreach, recruitment, and admissions; more responsive counseling, student affairs, basic skills, and tutorial services; the continued development of special programs and services; and improved faculty, staff, and student awareness of underprepared students and their preferred modes of learning. A bibliography of approximately 85 publications is appended. (SW)

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REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: BLACK STUDENT RETENTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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INSTITUTE ON DESEGREGATION

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COOPERATIVE PROJECT

This paper has been identified by a joint project of The Institute on Desegregation at North Carolina Central University and ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at George Washington University. The purposes of this project are to identify, collect, and make available literature concerned with

(1) the problems of minority students in higher education in general and
(2) the problems of desegregation in historically black colleges and universities in particular.

New published and unpublished materials are reviewed and recommended by participants of the Institute on Desegratation's Interinstitutional Research Group (ID/IRG) for acquisition by ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education. An annual bibliography of this material will be published under the names of ERIC and the Institute.

Various types of materials are being solicited, especially unpublished and unindexed materials, as well as publications, produced by faculty and staff members. Included in these may be unpublished faculty studies, institutional research studies, master's theses, monographs, papers presented at professional meetings, articles from general and scholarly periodicals, and conference and workshop proceedings not covered by ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education.

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REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The decade of the 1970's was one in which a great deal of attention was devoted to the status of black students in higher education. For the purposes of this report, attention was limited to issues concerned with the retention of black students, particularly those attending predominantly white colleges and universities. The literature surveyed is categorized into three groupings: (1) a conceptual approach to the issue of retention, (2) factors that affect retention, and (3) strategies and remedies that have been adopted to increase retention rates of black students.

A Conceptual Approach to the Retention Issue

There are several statistical projections pertinent to the issue of black student retention that should be considered as the literature is reviewed and its significance understood:

1. While the 1980s are a period in which a decline in the overall rate of postsecondary enrollment will continue to occur, there is a notable increase in the enrollment of minority students (Centra, 1980; Glenny, 1980; Godard, 1980; Henderson, 1977; Jackley and Henderson, 1979; Mayhew, 1979; Sedlacek and Webster, 1977; Thomas, Mingle, and McPartland, 1981).

2. The close of the 1970s and entry into the decade of the 1980s have been marked by a decrease in the rate of black student persistence at predominantly white universities and colleges (Astin, 1975; Centra, 1980; Lenning, Beal, and Sauer, 1980).

3. It is generally anticipated that a reduction of the availability of funds that have traditionally been delegated to higher education institutions by federal and state government will occur (Scott, 1981; Stone, 1977).

These projections and statistics serve to make urgent the need to identify and initiate effective strategies addressing black student retention.

It is, therefore, in the context of two spatial paradigms, the past and future, that current black student enrollment and the issue of black student retention, as it stands in 1982, can best be understood. In order to gain insight through a review of the literature as to what would be effective in 1982 and beyond, it seems essential that attention be given to a broad body of literature and analyses developed during the past ten to fifteen years.

Prominent among the literature is the philosophical mindset leading to and reflecting the Adams mandate to provide equal educational opportunity to black students. Two examples appear as chapters in Gail Thomas' edited work, Black Students In Higher Education, Conditions, and Experiences In the 1970s (1981): "The Adams Mandate: A Format for Achieving Equal Educational Opportunity and Attainment" (Haynes); and "Desegregation and Black Student Higher Educational Access" (Thomas, McPartland and Gottfredson). The latter is particularly noteworthy as an assessment of higher education desegregation in the aftermath of Adams which focuses on access, retention, and employment of black students rather than on more narrow goals of meeting requisite quota.

What have been the conditions from which evolved a rationale for this and other similar policy concerns? The most apparent answer is

found in the disproportionately low enrollment and high attrition rates of black students (Koon, 1979; Lehman and Sanford, 1978; Newlon and Gaither, 1980; Sedlacek and Webster, 1977; and Smith, 1981), along with the relatively low success rates of black students who have attended and/or graduated from postsecondary institutions (Althauser, Spivack, and Amsel, 1975; Coleman, Blum, Sorenson, and Rossi, 1972; Eckland and Wisenbaker, 1979; Persell, 1977). Although there is a proponderance of literature addressing the issue of disproportionality, there is significantly less uniformity with respect to descriptions of underlying causes of the problem.

A lack of consensus becomes especially obvious as we observe the movement of time and corresponding predictions and analyses. For example, there is a body of literature noting that the approximate period of the late 1960s and early 1970s yielded an incongruency between white and black student attitudes, particularly regarding concepts of black power (Ginzberg, 1969; MacDonald and Sites, 1972). The literature pointed to massive attitudinal conflicts and predicted an increase in racially based dissension and unrest. The main body of current literature continues to observe and recognize the significance of attitudinal conficts on predominantly white campuses which are racially definable; but what is not observed and indeed what generally has not occurred on most campuses since the 1960s is the manifestation of conflict in the form of mass protest activity.

Using the civil rights movement as a time delineator among the literature, it is also noteworthy to contrast operative assumptions forming the policy basis for increasing the enrollment of black

students at predominantly white universities and colleges. For example, during the early to mid 1960s, a primary goal was to integrate black students into white university systems. As is suggested by psychologists Bandura and Huston (1961), integration ideally represented a process of interaction and exposure out of which white models could affect black student behavior. Following the civil rights movement, an increasing number of researchers criticized the educational systems' refusal to educate black students on "black terms" (Taylor, 1970). In spite of the lack of a concise directive emanating from such a nebulous concept, the call for a more dynamic educational process addressing the intellectual and cultural needs of black students as well as of white students was apparent.

Attention to disproportionality, and related attitudinal/intellectual/cultural noncongruency serves to identify a set of conditions producing the Adams decision. The conceptual evolution of black student retention as an issue is illustrated by the literature's predominant approach to the subject in two categorical areas: (1) definition--(What are the factors that affect retention rates?), and (2) remediation--(What remedial strategies can be effectively implemented?).

Factors Affecting Retention

Conceptualization and implementation of remediating strategies must necessarily be preceded by an understanding of causal variable interrelationships. Level of academic preparation stands as a central determinant of student persistence (Astin, 1971; Bressler, 1967; Daves,

Loeb, and Robinson, 1970; Kowalski, 1977; Reed, 1978; and Sowell, 1972), yet the literature insists upon considering other externally controlled factors which significantly precipitate student withdrawal. An example of this is found in a study conducted at Merritt College in Oakland, California (Axtel and Coad, 1979). Among the 8.7% of the respondents in this study who were considering dropping out, financial difficulty was the most frequently cited reason, followed by the need to get a job and personal commitments or problems. Another 47.3% indicated they had given serious consideration to leaving at one time, and cited as reasons the need to get a job, personal commitments, and intention to transfer.

In another study, 32 academically ineligible black students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill were compared with academically eligible non-returning students at that institution (Sanford, 1979). It was found that academically ineligible students may have many of the same reasons for withdrawal as those given by students who withdraw voluntarily. Bad health or personal problems were most frequently listed by academically ineligible respondents as the single most important reason for withdrawal. Other studies identify such factors as family socioeconomic status, motivation, degree aspirations, personal values, self-concept, and environmental characteristics as correlates to student attrition (Axtel and Coad, 1979; Bressler, 1967; Burlew, 1979; Cross and Astin, 1981; Dicesare, et al., 1970; Harrower, Herrling, Houpt, and Maugle, 1980; Lenning, Beal, and Sauer, 1980; Pantages and Creedon, 1978; Peng and Fetters, 1977; Peterson, Blackburn, Gamson, Arce, Davenport, and Mingle, 1978; Reed, 1978; Smith, Maxwell, Carney, and Fontaine, 1976).

Other key factors identified by many researchers are alienation and group identification as variables which are specifically applicable to black students. Notable examples are found in the works of John Centra (1970), C. Hess Haagen (1977), and Irving Rootman (1972), who identified peer support as a factor to student persistence. Donald Smith (1980, 1981) also identified alienation and loneliness as the most common factors in black student attrition as expressed by students, black faculty, and administration.

While the observation of most studies which relate alienation to black student attrition focus on larger, predominantly white institutions, similar patterns have been identified at small private colleges (Claerbaut, 1978; Leggett, 1970).

Strategies and Remedies

Given the explanatory variables set forth above, what are the remediating strategies identified by the literature and what are some specific examples of programs and policies? As stated in the Action Plan for the California Community Colleges (California Community Colleges, 1979), generally the literature points to four strategies for positively affecting black student progression on the postsecondary level. These strategies include: (1) expanded efforts in outreach, recruitment, and admissions; (2) more responsive counseling, student affairs, basic skills, and tutorial services; (3) the continued development of special programs and services; and (4) improved faculty, staff and student awareness of underrepresented students and their preferred modes of learning. The literature presents a vast array of

programmatic theories and activities developed to address the problem of black student attrition. Attention to these theories and problems is herein given in the context of the four strategic areas delineated in the California plan.

Expanded Efforts in Outreach, Recruitment and Admissions.

One of the most critical prior conditions in a retention model is the recruitment and admissions of students. Much of the relevant research identified financial aid as the most important factor in recruiting minority students (Jones, 1979). The limited availability of financial resources among institutions necessitates a discriminatory selection procedure.

The process of recruitment and admissions is in part rationalized by a mechanism for predicting the performance of potential admittees. The predictive mechanism is especially critical to the recruitment and admissions of student-age persons who are black. The relevance of this mechanism is illustrated through studies showing a variant and inconsistent applicability of predictive variables to white and black student performance. An example of such a study is one developed by Kathryn Council (1974) which shows that SAT scores and high school rank, when used alone, were not accurate predictors of black student performance. On the other hand, studies have indicated that in certain academic areas grades were found to be the best predictor of black student retention (Bond and Lebold, 1977).

An institutional program falling within the framework of expanded efforts in outreach, recruitment, and admissions is described in a

chapter by Phillip Carey, Singh, and Pillinger (1981) entitled: "Impact: A Summer Enrichment Program for Minority/Disadvantaged Undergraduates at the University of Minnesota." Within this strategic area, the notion of "expanded efforts" is given added meaning by these authors who explain the University of Minnesota's enrichment program as utilizing a holistic approach to improving black student retention rates. Such an approach is regarded as being more encompassing and more effective than remedial and financial aid programs.

A mitigating factor relating specifically to admissions policies is the 1978 Bakke decision. Within the context of expanded efforts in this area, the literature is inconclusive in its evaluation of the manner and extent Bakke impacts on affirmative action policies. An increase in more stringently applied admissions criteria and a rise of more negative attitudes towards affirmative action in enrollment policies have been observed among some admissions agencies (Pettigrew, 1979). However, a significant body of social scientists and educators feel that in the aftermath of Bakke, at least some strain of affirmative action as a means of addressing disparate enrollment among minority groups will probably continue (Astin, 1978; Cox, 1979; Hamilton, 1979; Lincoln, 1979).

More Responsive Counseling, Student Affairs, Basic Skills, and Tutorial Services.

An approach to counseling, tutorial, and other related services has been identified emphasizing more responsiveness particularly in the areas of nonacademic administration (Sanford 1979). Increased

awareness of career planning (Hahn, 1974; Hillery, 1978; Kaye, 1972) has also been cited as a strategy affecting retention.

The Continued Development of Special Programs and Services.

Edward "Chip" Anderson, in a chapter entitled "A Retention Design Applied to an Equal Opportunity Program" (1978), identifies eleven themes used to coordinate successful retention programs for low income and minority undergraduates at UCLA which offer a basis for analyzing the role of special programs and services. The themes are listed below:

1. Program goals must be endorsed and supported by institution officials, and programmatic activities must be consistent with these goals. The goals which Anderson lists as requiring administrative endorsement and support include: (a) the desired mix of students to be recruited and admitted; (b) the level of academic performance desired from the various groups of students recruited, admitted, and retained; and (c) the rate of persistence expected and desired among the student groups.

2. Retention should begin with an ethically conducted recruitment program based upon documented characteristics of persisters.

3. To improve the flow of nontraditional students into colleges, alliances should be formed with feeder high schools and community colleges.

4. Institutions should offer thorough orientation, such that students understand institutional demands

5. It is important for participants to identify with equal opportunity programs yet not feel stigmatized by them.

6. The best retention services directly address areas of greatest student anxiety and frustration (i.e., financial resources, academic skill deficiencies, lack of career plans, difficulty in adjusting to the campus).

7. Retention programs should take the initiative in promoting and providing services.

8. In order to ensure program relevance, students should be treated as consumers.

9. Campus support for an equal opportunity program will result if the program accomplishes its objectives and demonstrates its value to the institution.

10. It is necessary to have an effective staff able to relate to students--a staff which can serve as change agents to stimulate student persistence and performance.

11. Program management must develop a developmental perspective.

Attention to special programs and services as they have been institutionally implemented serve as a basis for further assessing the significance of Anderson's eleven themes as well as the overall importance of this third strategy (Boyd, 1974; Clark, 1979; Moen, 1980; Romano, 1980; Washington, 1977; Zanoni, 1980).

Improve Faculty, Staff, and Student Awareness of Under-Represented Students and Their Preferred Modes of Learning

The literature calls for an approach to the educational system which takes into account both the academic and social elements (Cope, 1978; and Cope and Hannah, 1975; Tinto, 1975). These two areas are addressed by those studies which identify faculty predisposition and accessibility as factors crucial to the success rates of black students in higher education (Harrower, et al., 1980; Pascarella and Terencini, 1977; Spady, 1971; Walton, 1979). In addition, the integration of academic and social elements is identified as a retention strategy by those expressing a need for faculty awareness of the black culture and

the development of a curriculum more congruent to black students' learning styles and frames of reference (Young, 1981).

Also related to this fourth strategy is Sedlacek and Brooks' (1976) six-stage model in which racist behavior can be changed. The six steps to eliminating racism included in this model are: (1) recognize racial differences, (2) understand racism (consequences of, rather than motives, for behavior), (3) understand one's own bias, (4) analyze bias (understand the sources of their racial attitudes), (5) set goals, and (6) set strategies. Similarly, there is expressed among the literature a call for a total institutional response to the requirements of operating a multi-ethnic institution involving all levels of administration (Mather, 1975; Noel and Beal, 1979).

A summary point to the four general remediating strategies is to stress the importance of conceptualizing and developing plans of action which operate outside of what Andrew Goodrich (1977) has termed a "cultural deficit" model. Goodrich identifies the contemporary approach to black retention programs as fitting in the framework of a "cultural strength" model which would benefit all students enrolled in white institutions.

Summary

The overall information imparted from the main body of retention literature appears to yield three propositions:

1. That universities have had, during the past 10-15 years, variant experiences related to retention patterns and trends.

2. That there is identified a vast array of independent variables used to explain retention; and that there is no standard model of variable inclusion and even less consistency in the conceptualization of how these variables interrelate.
3. That the notion of what successful methods are must, therefore, be based upon tentative modes of analyses.

As informed persons who bear a responsibility for developing curriculums seeking to effectively remediate problems concerning black student retention, it appears that we are mandated by the literature to approach this issue with a critical eye and an expanded level of consciousness.

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